

KRYLENKO, Nikolai Vasilevich (May 2, 1885, village of Bekhteevo, Sychevsky uезд, Smolensk guberniia — July 29, 1938). Party and state figure. Son of a revolutionary who had been sent into exile. He was educated at the Faculty of History and Philology of St. Petersburg University (1909) and the Faculty of Law of Kharkov University (1914). In 1904, he joined the RSDLP; a Bolshevik. He left the Party in 1911 but rejoined it that same year. He conducted Party work in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kharkov.

He was arrested five times, but his punishment was limited to exile to Poland and Ukraine. In June 1906, he emigrated abroad. Upon his return, he conducted revolutionary propaganda among the soldiers of the St. Petersburg garrison, for which he was exiled to Lublin. He participated in organizing the transport of Party literature. In 1914, fearing arrest, he emigrated to Austria, from where he moved to Switzerland. In the summer of 1915, he returned to Moscow for underground work; he was arrested in November 1915 and sent to the army in April 1916. A participant in World War I; held the rank of *praporshchik* (ensign).

In 1917, he chaired various committees (up to the committee of the 11th Army). From June 1917, he was a member of the bureau of the Military Organization under the Central Committee of the RSDLP(b). He was arrested in July 1917 but released in September. From November... In 1917, he served as a People's Commissar and a member of the Committee on Military and Naval Affairs, and from November 9, 1917, to March 1918, as Supreme Commander-in-Chief. With his connivance, if not outright incitement, the former Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant General N.N. Dukhonin, was killed by Krylenko's escort on the day of his arrival at headquarters. He disbanded headquarters, dismissed "counterrevolutionarily inclined" officers, and introduced the election of command personnel; these actions disorganized the army and contributed to its total collapse. He demonstrated his complete unsuitability for high-level command posts.

From January 1918, he was a member of the All-Russian Collegium for the Organization and Formation of the Red Army. From March 1918, he served on the collegium of the People's Commissariat of Justice. From May 1918, he was Chairman of the

Revolutionary Tribunal (later the Supreme Revolutionary Tribunal) under the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK). From 1918 to 1922, he was a member of the collegium of prosecutors for the Supreme Tribunal under the VTsIK. From 1922, he served as Deputy People's Commissar, and from 1931 as People's Commissar of Justice of the RSFSR. Concurrently, from 1922 to 1928, he was an Assistant Prosecutor, and from 1928 to 1931, the Prosecutor of the RSFSR. From 1927 to 1934, he was a member of the Central Control Commission of the VKP(b).

Alongside his primary duties, Krylenko headed the All-Union Society for Proletarian Tourism and the USSR Chess and Checkers Association, and led expeditions in the Pamirs (1930–1934).

Krylenko was one of the architects of the socialist justice system and a court structure based not on legality but on “revolutionary necessity.” He consistently maintained that the tribunal was “an instrument of the workers' political struggle, directed against their enemies.” He served as prosecutor in major show trials, including those of the “Tactical Center,” a group of clergy, the “Central Committee of the Right SR Party,” the “Shakhty Trial,” the “Industrial Party” [*Prompartiiia*] case, the “Glavtop” case, the “Polish Priests” case, and others. Under his tenure, the legal foundations for mass repressions were laid, and the practices of politically motivated punishment, mass arrests, and extrajudicial prosecution became widespread.

In May 1934, he drafted provisions penalizing treason against the state and mandating the death penalty (these later evolved into the infamous Article 58). He regarded a defendant's personal confession as the ultimate proof of guilt. He served as the USSR People's Commissar of Justice from July 20, 1936. “Only hypocrites,” Krylenko declared, “can claim that a civil class struggle can dispense with the physical elimination of the adversary.”

He was removed from office on January 19, 1938. He authored numerous works on legal theory in which he justified the absence of legality in revolutionary courts. He was arrested on February 1, 1938, sentenced to death on July 29, 1938, and executed by shooting. He was rehabilitated in 1955.

—K.A. Zaleskii, “Nikolai Vasilevich Krylenkom,” *Imperiia Stalina: biograicheskii entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*. Moscow: Veche, 2000; pp. 248–249.